Excellence in health care requires effective teamwork where multiple disciplines collaborate to provide patient centered care. Not unlike a championship football team, health care clinicians must practice together to learn their unique roles as well as how to function as a group in order to achieve quality outcomes. Research suggests that collaborative nurse-physician relationships are associated with lower patient mortality rates, fewer readmissions to the hospital and higher patient satisfaction. In addition, enhanced understanding between nurses and physicians regarding one another’s roles and expertise may ultimately prevent health care errors.

In an effort to support interprofessional education, the Capstone College of Nursing and the University of Alabama College of Community Health Sciences have partnered to provide undergraduate nursing students and third and fourth year medical students the chance to study competencies associated with effective teams, while also getting to know more about each other.

With this partnership, administration and faculty are working to provide opportunities for health professions students to engage in interactive learning with those outside their profession. The ultimate objective is to prepare students for deliberatively working together with the common goal of building a safer and better patient-centered health care system.

Faculty from CCN and CCHS collaborate to provide an opportunity for students to interact weekly for two hours to learn from and with each other about topics including four competencies associated with interprofessional education — values/ethics for interprofessional practice, roles/responsibilities, interprofessional communication, and teams and teamwork.

The course provides a forum for the disciplines to interact with each other to discuss and resolve shared issues commonly encountered in the health care environment. Students meet in the classroom and the clinical practice lab at CCN to learn how to perform critical care procedures, based on current best practice guidelines, as teams as opposed to traditional methods where they have learned in isolation of one another. The course will culminate with an interactive interprofessional simulation in the school of nursing simulation lab.

Students have shown great enthusiasm for the course and have identified instances in their own experiences where they have witnessed a lack of communication between physicians and nurses. Likewise, students have verbalized how they plan to prevent communication breakdowns which are known to be associated with major errors in both acute and community health care settings.

Faculty has witnessed students learning about each other’s unique contributions to patient care, as opposed to preconceived ideas based on limited exposure and/or stereotypes. As one nursing student reported during the first week of class, “nurses are the eyes and ears for the health care provider and advocate for the patient when they cannot advocate for themselves”. Likewise, medical students reported how they “marvel at what nurses know about each patient, and how they ‘depend upon nursing to inform them of critical information as they complete their daily rounds”. Although the course is new, students and faculty agree that the foundation for effective interprofessional practice will be strengthened as a result of the partnership between administration, faculty and students at the CCN and the CCHS.